

Week of August 5-11

BELLY LAUGH

Scripture Reading: Read 2 Corinthians 9

When is the last time you laughed? Oh, not a little chuckle or a stifled chortle, but a real belly laugh. You know the kind. The type of laugh that leaves you breathless, with your sides hurting, and tears streaming down your cheeks. So, when is the last time you laughed like that? My guess is that it wasn't last Sunday in church when you put your money in the offering plate, was it? I didn't think so. You probably didn't even think to break into a grin or smile or even giggle when you gave your gifts to the Lord. The offering plate or basket came by and you dropped in your check, your offering envelope or some cash and then went right back to what you were doing before...maybe enjoying an offertory, reading the bulletin, talking to a neighbor or listening to someone give the morning announcements.

What would happen if we approached the offering in the service with Paul's statement in mind: *"Each one should give what he or she has decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver"*? Cheerful giving! Happy giving! Laughing giving! That would shake things up in the service, wouldn't it?

The problem is that so many believers have missed the heart of God when it comes to giving and give to God for wrong reasons; reasons that leave them feeling less than cheerful. Some give out of guilt. The offering plate passes by and these folks feel guilty if they don't give to God, so they throw a few dollars in the plate as it passes by to soothe their conscience. Others give out of fear. They're afraid that if they don't give to God then God will get them somehow. They give because they feel blackmailed by God (or by the preacher! Ouch!) Still others give out of duty. Putting their check or cash in the plate is no different than paying the electric bill or the telephone bill. It's a bill that has to be paid and they make sure they do their duty. Some give out of show. They don't want to look stingy by not putting anything in the plate or they want people to see what they're giving so that folks think they are something special. Others give out of greed believing that if they give to God, that God is obligated to give it back to them a hundredfold. Finally, some give to the church solely to get a tax-deduction! No wonder there is so little cheering, laughing and worshipping when the offering is received in the church.

According to Paul, it can be so much more. So, what do you think? Giving to God as a joyful, cheerful, experience and an act of worship to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Sounds radical doesn't it? But why? We worship in song joyfully. We greet one another during the service joyfully. We testify to God's blessings and answers to prayer joyfully, why not give to the Lord joyfully as well? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we looked at giving as a "get to" not a "got to"; as a delight and not a duty?

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Reflect on your motive for giving offerings to God. Is it out of guilt, fear, duty, show or just for a tax deduction? Isn't it time for God to change your heart and have giving become a time of joy? Pray for the Lord that next Sunday when you put your check or cash in the plate, that you could step out in faith and burst into a belly laugh of joy at the privilege of worshiping God with your giving.

Take-a-way: *When you give to God, don't forget to include a belly laugh of joy!*